

A Perspective on Manager and Student

Internship Experiences


by

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ABSTRACT

Internship experiences have always been held in high regard, yet very little evaluation has been done to determine if internship programs are serving the needs of the student and the company as a whole. In this study, interns and managers of Company X were interviewed to determine their perspective on the internship program. Questions were asked to ascertain the benefits of the current internship program at this company, skills that the intern gains during the experience, and if the opportunity helped the intern in their career search. All participants were also asked to offer suggestions for improving the current internship program. The data was collected during the months of March and April of 2009. Intern and manager responses were analyzed and grouped into similar and dissimilar responses to each question. Conclusions were made from these responses to address the research questions. The results verified that the program is beneficial to intern students and the company. Conclusions were made as suggestions to improve this company's current internship program.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Background Information

What is an internship? According to the words of the University of Wisconsin-Stout, an internship is;

An advanced and culminating experience prior to entry into a professional career. An intern functions on a professional level and is usually paid for the work performed.

Internships are conducted under the direction (direct or indirect) of an instructor and are designed to provide "real life" or "on-the-job" experiences for the student, with the opportunity to critique and refine skills through contact with the instructor, and with an on-site supervisor assigned to work with the intern at the work site. Internships are usually practiced on a full-time basis. Credits earned are commensurate with the hours involved and the quality and quantity of the learning experience. (UW-Stout, 2008, n. p.)

But does this statement encompass everything in a good internship experience?

This idea of a student transitioning into the work place is not a new concept. Internships are also known as cooperative education. Cooperative education dates back as far as 1906 in the United States. Herman Schneider, an engineering professor and later the Engineering Program Dean at the University of Cincinnati, had the idea for one of the first cooperative education opportunities for his engineering program (Driscoll, 2006). Schneider had opposition to his idea from both education and business. Nonetheless he piloted the first cooperative education program in 1906 with 27 electrical and chemical engineers. Word spread quickly about the new program and it was coined "The Cincinnati Plan" (Sovilla, 1998). General Motors also was a pioneer in cooperative education. Charles Kettering, also known as "Boss Ket," was a teacher and an electrical engineer. He founded DELCO Laboratories, which later was bought out by

General Motors. Kettering became the vice president of General Motors Research Corporation in 1920. He publicly spoke about his support of a work-study approach to learning. Kettering eventually served as a founder of General Motors Institute (GMI) in Flint. GMI is now called Kettering University in his honor (Mroczek, 2006).

So, what makes up a good internship program? Intern students should see their experience as more than just a way to dress up their resume with a big company's name (Traster, 2007). Sometimes the intern students are more concerned with how the experience will look on a resume versus selecting a program that will "offer its participants substantive, creative, and challenging work" (Coco, 2000 p. 41-43, 47). On the other hand, the interns should understand that the entire experience would be an impressive addition to a resume (Ramos, 1997). It is important to set realistic goals and expectations during the internship experience (Coco, 2000). Another important aspect is that the internship activities will compliment what the student is learning in school (Farinelli & Mann, 1994; Perry, 1999). Internships also offer socialization and acculturation opportunities for students (Tovey, 2001). The intern should be introduced to different aspects of the company and alternate career paths that they may not be aware exist (Heller, 1997). For example, an intern should have the opportunity to interact with different departments and in multiple roles within a given field. Instead of having engineering interns sit at the computer and create drawings the entire experience, make opportunities for him/her to attend design meetings and work with the R&D department in testing and evaluation of new products. The experience should also prepare the intern for a smoother transition from school to work as Rothman (2007) suggested. Finally, a good internship should be a win-win for the intern and the business or that the program benefits both the business' interests and the student's learning needs (Piskurich, 1997; Messmer, 1999).

The company, hereafter referred to as Company X, in this study started their internship program about 20 years ago. The program started slowly. There were only a few students each year. The numbers of intern students increased gradually to over 50 students in the last two years. The most popular interning departments are engineering, accounting, human resources, and information technology. About 30% of students who intern with this company are hired full time after they finish their schooling. Human Resources did not keep track of exactly how many intern students they have hosted from the beginning of the internship program (personal communication, Human Resources Department, February, 18, 2008).

Statement of Problem

Last year, Company X employed 26 interns within various departments. Company X has done very little follow-up assessment with former intern students to determine the effectiveness of the internship program. This study will attempt to analyze aspects of the internship program.

Purpose of the Study

Any good program should be evaluated for effectiveness and improvements are made to benefit both the intern students and the sponsoring company. The purpose of this study is to ascertain the intern and intern manager's perception of the internship program at Company X.

Individuals who have completed and supervised an internship with this company were surveyed. The survey determined strengths and weaknesses of the current program, specific skills learned during their experience, it's effect on career advancement, and possible suggestions for program improvement.

Research Questions

The following objectives are designed to determine the effectiveness of this internship program.

1. What are the benefits of the current internship program as viewed by former intern students and intern student managers?
2. What skills do interns gain during the internship program from an intern and intern manager's perspective?
3. Does the internship experience contribute to an intern's career search after graduation?
4. What are the participants' suggestions for improving the current internship program?

Limitations of the Study

Below is a list of anticipated limitations for this study.

1. This study only pertains to the internship program of this company. The information gathered in this study is not applicable and non transferable to any other situations. Therefore this study should be conducted in other companies if repeatability is to be determined.
2. This study will only reflect the effectiveness as perceived by intern students and managers who had their intern experience at this company. Internship programs at other companies will not be surveyed to determine the effectiveness of their specific experiences.
3. This study is limited to the focus group of former intern students and managers who chose to participate. Former intern students or managers who are reluctant to participate might have differing views of the internship program. This possible variance in opinions will not be determined in this study.
4. Student or manager perception is not always a valid indicator of program success. Other sources will not be taken into consideration.

5. Intern responses are subject to interpretation. Short answer questions have to be interpreted to determine the intern's perceptions of the internship program. All data will be sorted at the researcher's discretion.

Definition of Terms

Below is a list of terms related to this study.

Cooperative Education: A learning approach that integrates college studies with working experiences in industry, business, government and public service. Under the plan, students leave campus for three to six months for the rigors and responsibilities of actual employment situations. The objective is to offer an additional option for learning and to give students a realistic education (University of Wisconsin-Stout, 2008, n. p.)

Intern: "Someone who is finishing their training for a skilled job especially by obtaining practical experience of the work involved" (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, n.d., n.p.)

Internship: "A period of time spent doing a job as part of becoming qualified to do it" (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, n.d., n.p.)

Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter will discuss the traits that make up good internship programs. What the intern student looks for in an internship experience, the benefits of an internship to the intern and the sponsoring company will also be reviewed. The chapter will conclude with disadvantages of poorly structured internship programs.

What Makes Up a Good Internship Program?

Selection of Interns. Competitors hire good interns quickly. When a company is looking for exceptional interns, they will begin interviewing potential intern students four to six weeks before the intern is expected to start (Farinelli & Mann, 1994). Companies also look at a potential intern student's extracurricular activities to determine leadership potential (Coco, 2000). To acquire good interns the company should have some sort of selection process in place to determine which candidates will be selected for the open position (Coco, 2000; Crumbley & Sumners, 1998).

Companies that are looking for good interns recruit by contacting career services at colleges and universities that offer credit for internship experience (Rothman, 2007; Traster, 2007). A company that is looking to fill a specialized career discipline will seek out intern students at schools that offer degrees in those specialized areas. They also actively take part in campus career fairs (Traster, 2007).

Formal orientation and exit interview process. The intern should be treated as any other new employee and go through a formal orientation process (Tovey, 2001). The orientation process involves anything that new employees are introduced to before beginning his/her new position. Examples of this would be a tour of the facility, introduction to the company or department at a formal meeting, and employee handbook training.

Good internship programs conduct formal entrance and exit interviews. The interview process at the beginning of the experience should be exactly like the interviews for potential full-time employees (Traster, 2007). Ask the intern to provide transcripts and references (Traster, 2007). An exit interview helps the company to determine what was done well and what could be improved on when hosting future interns (Messmer, 1999).

Structure a specific curriculum for interns. One of the most common suggestions found in the literature was for companies to provide an internship program structure. Before an internship experience even takes place, there are many steps involved in the pre-planning of a successful internship experience. The company should request the criterion for successful internship placement from colleges that offer internships for their students. This will help them to design an outline for a meaningful internship experience that meets the objectives of the school (Rothman, 2007). College officials have extensive knowledge available on how to build a program that serves both the firm and the student (Messmer, 1999).

- Before the intern even arrives, the company should have a job description for the internship position. The job description should include: student responsibilities, internship objectives, who the intern will report to, and the basic competencies needed to perform the job. These descriptions can be easily adapted from new hire job descriptions (Crumbley & Sumners, 1998).
- Having a budget set, or at least a clear understanding of how much a company is willing to invest in the internship program, is a very important part of the pre-planning process. Some costs of internships can include: intern wages and benefits, training and orientation sessions, supervisors, mentors, office accommodations, and equipment like a computer or tools (Crumbley & Sumners, 1998).

- The company should have specific policies and procedures in place for the internship program (Crumbley & Sumners, 1998). The intern student should sign an agreement that spells out the terms of the internship. These documents include start and end dates and should identify any time accommodations for other classes or exams (Traster, 2007).
- At the beginning of the program, the company should have clearly defined projects and a schedule for completion of tasks (Rothman, 2007; Coco, 2000; Farinelli & Mann, 1994).
- Good businesses are prepared to offer “thorough training in the proper operation and maintenance of any equipment or software used during the internship” (Tovey, 2001, p. 233).

Interns are still students and the main reason of this experience is to learn. Good programs allow interns to participate in the same development opportunities that are offered to their junior level staff (Messmer, 1999).

Provide a manager. A successful internship always has a manager who oversees the intern student (Coco, 2000). Positive intern managers have strong instructional skills and are very patient (Crumbley & Sumners, 1998). A good manager will help the interns to prioritize and plan their day with an appropriate work load (Tovey, 2001). The manager also takes time to discuss the progress and offer advice to the intern student (Crumbley & Sumners, 1998). Feedback is an ongoing process for internship experiences. Good managers provide ongoing feedback and allow the intern to shadow them whenever possible (Rothman, 2007).

Provide a mentor. Providing a mentor is a very important and often overlooked part of a successful internship program (Rothman, 2007; Coco, 2000). Companies with exceptional

internship programs offer a mentor to the intern student who should be someone other than the manager (Watson, 1995). Make sure the person who is selected to mentor new interns is eager to take on this new responsibility (Messmer, 1999). Interns will more openly discuss problems and concerns with people other than a direct supervisor (Watson, 1995). Some managers purposely try to avoid a mentoring relationship because they feel it could compromise their managerial authority (Watson, 1995). This is why it is important to have a mentor available to the intern student. Strong mentors are good communicators and are knowledgeable in their line of work (Messmer, 1999). As with good managers, good mentors provide ongoing feedback and allow the intern to shadow them whenever possible (Rothman, 2007). Providing teaching opportunities as they present themselves is an important part of being a good mentor (Rothman, 2007; Coco, 2000). The mentor should also plan to meet with the intern student on a weekly basis to support and clarify assignments (Messmer, 1999).

Assign meaningful and challenging work assignments. Assigning meaningful and challenging work assignments means that a company should try to give interns work that closely mirrors what they will expect to do when they graduate with their degree (Rothman, 2007). In advance, the coordinator of the internship should determine types of work that will be assigned to the intern (Crumbley & Sumners, 1998). These tasks should be accomplishable within the internship timeframe (Coco, 2000). Orienting the intern with the process is important. Successful intern managers do not assign a large project or task immediately, but start with basic tasks and when the intern shows competence in that task, have him/her start on small pieces of a larger project (Messmer, 1999; Perry, 1999). It is important to explain the importance behind each work assignment (Rothman, 2007; Coco, 2000). Meaningful work shows the intern that the company values what he/she is doing. This will increase the intern's motivation (Tovey, 2001).

Give the intern opportunities to experience aspects of the entire organization. An intern should not be expected to stay in one department doing one task the entire internship experience. They should be encouraged to see opportunities in other areas of the company (Coco, 2000; Watson, 1995). This could be as simple as the supervisor or mentor taking time to allow the intern to sit in on his/her meetings or listen in on phone conversations (Rothman, 2007; Messmer, 1999). Some companies have their interns visit client locations or vendor sites to gain a better perspective of how the company works with outside entities (Farinelli & Mann, 1994).

Reinforces the intern's school-based learning to real world situations. Good internship programs reinforce and supplement an intern's school-based learning (Rothman, 2007). The intern student should be able to take what he/she learns in the classroom and apply it to a real world setting (Tovey, 2001; Coco, 2000; Watson, 1995). The practical on-the-job learning can be used to reinforce textbook centered curriculum (Crumbley & Sumners, 1998; Farinelli & Mann, 1994).

Exposure to the entire business. An intern will look for networking opportunities and should have the opportunity to attend professional functions (Messmer, 1999). Networking opportunities are important. The interns should have time to network with professionals in their field. This creates contacts that could be valuable to them in the future (Rothman, 2007; Messmer, 1999).

What Interns Look for in an Internship Program

Intern students should know what they are looking for when entering into an internship with a company. Students are attracted to big name corporations because they feel it will look good on their resume (Traster, 2007). An intern student should have realistic expectations about what they will be doing in their internship position. They can assess if the internship experience

will fit with what they are looking for during the interview process (Coco, 2000). Interns also want to “work cross-functionally, interface with clients, and learn about other parts of the business” (Rothman, 2007, p. 142).

Benefits of an Internship Experience for the Intern

Internship experiences provide a smooth transition from school to paid employment (Rothman, 2007). The students often value and appreciate what was learned during this experience (Rothman, 2007). Practical work experience is important to employers. Internships give the student this practical work experience (Messmer, 1999). The intern students see the experience as an advantage to gaining a job compared to students who have not completed an internship (Rothman, 2007; Watson, 1995). This is believed with good reason, because interns are hired for a job because of the experience gained from their internship experience (Rothman, 2007). This could be due to the employer’s perception of competence and maturity of internship students (Coco, 2000). Working in a real business helps an intern understand the concept of professionalism in a workplace environment or “transitioning from student to professional” (Tovey, 2001, p. 238). The intern usually earns money from the host company of the internship (Perry, 1999). The experience and knowledge gained during an internship can help students in future classes (Perry, 1999). Students also get the opportunity to test out a potential company with no commitment after the internship is over (Coco, 2000; Heller, 1997). Internship experiences will help students in making educational and career choice decisions after he/she graduates (Tovey, 2001).

Benefits of an Internship to a Company

Internships help to recruit and develop future employees. “Internships are an essential part of recruitment success for many Fortune 500 Companies” (Rothman, 2007, p.140).

Businesses gain energetic and ambitious help for a low cost to the company (Traster, 2007; Coco, 2000; Farinelli & Mann, 1994). Some companies have special projects or positions that they cannot afford to hire or contract out. An intern student is an inexpensive way to get these important project accomplished (Farinelli & Mann, 1994). Interns can also bring a new perspective and ideas to a business (Farinelli & Mann, 1994). A fresh perspective can create new solutions to old problems (Crumbley & Sumners, 1998). A company may want to provide a new management opportunity for junior level employees, assigning interns to this person may be a way to determine management effectiveness on a short-term basis (Farinelli & Mann, 1994). The company can also save time and money on recruitment costs of entry-level employees (Watson, 1995; Farinelli & Mann, 1994). If interns are hired, he/she will already understand the culture of the organization (Farinelli & Mann, 1994). An internship experience is a risk-free trial of a potential employee with no commitment (Coco, 2000). The company can get to know the student before they commit to hiring him/her. Finally, it is a very rewarding experience for employees to see an intern student grow in learning on the job (Farinelli & Mann, 1994).

Disadvantages of Poorly Structured Internship Programs

“Not all internships are created equal” (Coco, 2000, p. 42). Internships are much different from business to business. Below are common problems within a poorly structured internship program that should be avoided.

Disorganization of program. A good internship program allows the intern to participate in a formal orientation program. In many cases a company has a good orientation program in place but does not have the intern participate in new employee orientation (Tovey, 2001). The intern student feels like they he/she is thrown into projects with little to no direction (Rothman, 2007).

Lack of respect of the intern. Treating an intern like a part-time employee will compromise the internship experience for the intern (Rothman, 2007). Clear communication that the intern should be treated as an equal team member is an important part of the manager or mentor's responsibilities. The intern's role in an organization should always be taken seriously (Tovey, 2001). Treating the intern as a part of the professional staff is essential to making the intern feel they are actually part of the profession (Crumbley & Sumners, 1998).

Communication breakdowns. When the manager or mentor do not communicate clearly, it is difficult for the intern to succeed (Rothman, 2007). Some companies do not remember that the intern is still a student and will need time and flexibility to go to other classes, study for tests, and write other papers (Tovey, 2001). The experience can be compromised when a supervisor does not spend valuable one-on-one time with the intern student (Rothman, 2007). Many companies do not provide a mentor, (other than the manager or direct supervisor) to work with the intern student (Watson, 1995).

Work that is not challenging enough for the intern. Internship experiences that are not structured correctly can force the student to do the same simple job on a repetitive basis (Rothman, 2007; Messmer, 1999). Like "offering interns relatively few tasks more challenging than the proverbial making copies and stuffing envelopes." (Farinelli & Mann, 1994, p.35). When the student begins to feel like he/she is not benefiting from the internship, he/she would rather spend time studying (Watson, 1995). An intern may not be experienced enough to handle advanced assignments, but on the other hand, repetitive clerical assignments could give the intern student negative impressions of his/her experience (Crumbley & Sumners, 1998). It is never a good sign when the intern has to demand more challenging assignments (Coco, 2000).

Lack of equipment and supplies to do the job. Poor planning ahead can leave an intern without the proper tools to complete their goals. If the intern does not have adequate office accommodations such as a telephone, computer or their own office cubicle could make the intern feel like they are really not part of the team (Crumbley & Sumners, 1998).

Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the intern and intern manager's perception of the internship program at Company X. This chapter will include the selection of samples, research method, the instrument used, and how data was collected. Data collection, data analysis, and the limitations will also be addressed in this chapter.

Description of Research Method

This qualitative research is an ethnographic study, it will be descriptive and qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is used to analyze human behavior. This research usually involves a smaller more focused sample group and attempts to answer why and how people make decisions.

Subject Selection

The subjects for this study were three intern students that participated in an internship experience at Company X within the last three years. Another was selected because he is currently employed with this company. The next intern was selected because he accepted a position outside the company upon completion of school. The final intern was selected because he is currently a full time student pursuing a degree in the field of his internship experience. This group represents the options available to post intern opportunities.

The three intern managers that participated are all currently employed as full time engineering managers at Company X. These managers report to various departments but were selected primarily because they were direct supervisors of the interns participating in this study.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were designed for interviewing the intern students and intern managers following the internship experience. The survey included 19 short answer questions for both the intern and manager. The questions were worded differently for the managers than what was

asked of the intern but each question coordinated with the respective question on the other survey. For example the intern's question number four was, "tell me about your manager." The manager's question four was, "tell me about your management style as it pertains to managing intern students." The questions were developed using the research in Chapter Two as a basis for determining specific factors that good internship experiences have in common (see attached survey forms, Appendix A).

The participants were given a copy of the questionnaire prior to the interview and were provided with time to review it and ask questions. Some participants requested the survey ahead of time. One manager made notes on his copy before the interview. The majority of the participants read along as the questions were asked. The interns and managers were allowed time to reflect on each question before providing an answer.

Data Collection

The data was collected during the months of March and April of 2009. The interns and managers were initially contacted via e-mail, telephone, or verbally, and asked to participate in the study. The intern students were interviewed in person using the Internship Evaluation Questionnaire (Intern.) The managers were also interviewed in person using the Internship Evaluation Questionnaire (Manager). In most cases the participant was taken out to lunch or supper and the interview was conducted after the meal. One manager was interviewed in the privacy of his office, at work, during his lunch break. The format of the interview process allowed for additional questions to clarify or provide further information from either the interviewer or interviewee.

Each participant was asked if it would be acceptable to record their responses using a digital voice recording device. All of the participants agreed.

Data Analysis

All appropriate descriptive methods will be used to analyze the data. Each question will be analyzed separately to look for similarities and dissimilarities as they pertain to the intern or manager responses.

Chapter IV: Data Analysis

This chapter includes the results of the interview data analysis. Intern responses were analyzed and grouped into similar and dissimilar responses to each question. The managers' responses were also grouped based on similar and dissimilar responses to their individual survey questions.

Benefits of Internship Program as Perceived by Interns

Research question one asked what are the benefits of the current internship program as viewed by former intern students and inter student managers. The data showed the student interns felt that the internship was very beneficial. Below are some of the comments that support their beliefs.

One intern said that he developed his passion for engineering during the experience. He also said that he learned how to work with different people in teams how to interact with other engineers, and how engineering meetings were structured. He also mentioned that it was gratifying to complete a project and know that it has gone to full production.

Another intern thought that working closely with other engineers was invaluable. He said that, "you can't pay for that type of education." He also pointed out that he was assigned a mentor and it worked out "awesome." This intern also stated that he learned a lot about engineering and life in general from his mentor. The mentor was able to give him much more attention than the manager. He strongly felt it would not have been as successful of an experience without his mentor.

The other intern enjoyed the freedom to design and innovate even though he was new to the company. He appreciated the flexibility he was allowed when given a broad task and allowed to run with it. This intern also received specialized safety training that his business group

conducts for all new hires. He said that he also participated in a presentation by the safety manager. The presentation touched on topics like, dangerous work areas, safety in the lab, and general manufacturing safety. This intern said that he thought the training he received would be especially helpful for all intern students.

Two interns stated that their manager was prepared for the internship when they began their experience. Both said they had a work area set up with a computer and telephone. In one case the intern said that he was set up just like a new employee. In both cases, they felt the manager had work projects in mind for them at the beginning of the experience.

All three interns believed that their internship assignments were important. One mentioned he was involved in testing of a new product, as well as working on service call related issues. Another intern said that the lab time was valuable in evaluating components and developing knowledge. Another was involved in safety related projects and believed everything related to product safety was very important. When asked if the assignments were clearly communicated by the manager they all responded yes. One Intern added that his manager would start projects out as one or two simple or smaller scale tasks. Progressively his projects became larger in scale or he had to juggle multiple smaller projects at the same time. Two interns mentioned that the assignments could change on the roll or were purposely left ambiguous up front to challenge them.

In all three cases the interns were involved in department and organizational related meetings. Some of the meetings that they attended included, engineering meetings, design reviews, business unit meetings, and project timeline meetings.

All three interns said that they felt very involved in organizational events and out of office activities. The interns were invited to many activities. Some company related experiences

included, the summer employee picnic, Christmas parties, offsite team building activities, employee recognition parties and golf outings. The non work related activities included, "happy hours," and parties. The interns also offered that they were treated very well and felt welcomed when they attended both company related and non work related activities.

The interns also said that they were treated exceptionally well across the board. One intern said that people understand you are an intern and are always willing to help. Two interns mentioned that they were treated as if they were the actual engineers by coworkers.

Benefits of the Internship Program as Perceived by Managers

The data also showed that intern managers felt the internship was beneficial to the intern. Below are some of the comments that support the managers' beliefs.

One manager liked to be proactive and prepare tasks that are appropriate for the skill level of the intern. He likes to have the training pieces in line up front and a group of contacts for the intern to work with. This manager also will have a work station ready for the intern that consists of at least a desk, computer, and phone. Some interns also get an e-mail account set up if needed.

The other manager said that the work is number one. He clarified by saying he has to have plenty of meaningful work for the intern. He stated it is important to balance learning with keeping the student on task.

Manager three said he needs to identify where the intern will sit and set them up with a work station and e-mail access. He said that communication with the team the intern will be working with up front is important. He also makes sure that safety, lab, and equipment training is ready up front.

All three managers said that they give the intern a mentor. One said that the mentor may shift from person to person, or engineer to technician based on the project or needs of the intern. Another manager stated that people who are involved in mentoring the intern are essential to a positive experience for both the intern and the company.

All three managers also said that they always send their interns to the new employee meeting. The managers said that these meetings cover formal policies, sexual harassment, culture, and general safety. They also give their interns a specialized training for their department. This specialized training included, department basics, documentation rules, and lab/department safety.

From all three manager's perspective they agreed that the intern students are treated very well within this organization. All three managers immediately responded yes that they would recommend this company to interns looking for a meaningful internship experience.

The Intern Perspective on Skills Learned

Research question two asked what skills do interns gain during the internship program from an intern and intern manager's perspective? The data showed the student interns felt that they gained some specific skills during their experience. Below are some of the comments that support their beliefs.

One intern said that the experience also improved his brainstorming and problem solving skills. He also received some specialized safety and equipment training during his internship experience which improved his knowledge and skills in that area.

Another intern said that the lab experience was very important. He noted that it was valuable to work on projects with an engineering team and incorporating different disciplines.

Communicating with vendors and lab/testing skills were also skills that he learned during his experience.

The third intern said that he received lots of hands-on engineering experience making it a win-win situation for the company and the intern.

All three interns had a fair amount of interaction with different departments while interning at this company. Two of the interns pointed out that the interaction was less at the beginning of the experience and as they gained confidence they began to interact more with different areas outside of their department.

The Manager Perspective on Skill Learned

The data showed that intern managers also felt that the internship experience will give the intern skills that are essential to an engineering student. Below are some of the managers' comments.

One manager said that some of the skills an intern will develop are; communication, technical, organizational, team work, and new software applications.

Working with people was a main skill another manager said the interns take away from this experience. He also said that the interns can spend time in specific areas and be able to apply those skills they learned at school to work.

The other manager said that the interns will come away with a better knowledge of how businesses work and how engineering teams interact with manufacturing and other engineering teams. He also pointed out that interns have a better knowledge of what it takes to get to the end product. Other skills that improved include; problem solving, better communication, discipline, vendor/customer interaction, overcoming intimidation of a product, and software applications.

All three managers tried to give interns important training that included; general company policies, safety related, documentation, CAD modeling, thermal data collection, and other specialized lab/testing equipment training.

All three managers also encouraged their interns to participate in organizational events and out of the office activities. Organizational events that these managers will invite the intern to include, offsite team building activities, retirements, employee anniversaries, and a new intern cookout event.

Intern's Career Search

Research questions three asked does the internship experience contribute to an intern's career search after graduation. The data showed the student interns felt that the internship gave them positive career opportunities. Below are some of the comments that supported their beliefs.

Intern Perspective

One intern stated that after the internship experience they have an advantage over students that do not participate in an internship program. He mentioned that he has skills in specific design programs that others in his engineering classes did not. He also said that students look highly on internship offers that are in engineering fields.

Another intern stated that he was immediately offered a full-time position at the end of his experience.

The other intern said that the internship experience helped him to overcome intimidation of a first major career working for a large well known company.

Two out of three interns said that they had a formal interview. The two that had a formal interview described it as a "real interview" or geared toward hiring for a full-time engineering position within the company. They were asked questions related to their current job skills and

engineering knowledge. One intern mentioned that it helped him understand what engineering interviews are like.

Another intern received what he would consider a formal exit interview. He stated that it seemed like a performance evaluation where the manager went over what he did well and areas where he could improve. He said that it was professional level compared to other experiences. The manager also offered tips for being successful in school and for a full-time engineering position.

With the exception of one intern that is currently completing his degree in engineering, the other two interns gained immediate employment after graduating from their program. Both were offered jobs with this company. One accepted a position with the company and one chose to pursue an offer from a different manufacturing company.

Manager Perspective

The data showed that intern managers also felt that the experience helped the intern student prepare for their career search. Below are ideas the managers had regarding this topic.

One manager made a comment that he tries to encourage his intern students to interact with other business units as much as possible. He said that this helps the intern develop working relationships and begin networking. He said that this experience is not only a "resume builder" but also a "contact builder."

Another manager pointed out the importance of the intern to be able to have opportunities to network.

Improving the Internship Program

Research question four asked what are the participants' suggestions for improving the current internship program. Below are some of the comments and suggestions that the interns offered.

One intern said that this was the first internship experience for his particular manager and mentioned that it was a little less organized. He had a work space ready for him with a computer and phone but he felt that there was little direction up front on what projects he would be working on. The intern stated that he felt like, "here is the intern, what can we do with him?" He also offered that interns in different departments should be allowed to work with each other and be given the opportunity to see what things other interns in the organization are working on.

Another intern pointed out that he received no safety training. He joked and said it felt like, "here is the lab don't do anything stupid!" He also mentioned that he was a little disappointed that he worked on the design of a new project for quite a bit of time and then the project was discontinued shortly before he left. He also said that the biggest thing is to make sure the company is prepared for the intern. He also would have liked to see extremely clear objectives up front. He would have liked to know up front what the company expected from him. He said that a more formal interview would have been nice also. His final comment was that it is important to have meaningful projects for the intern. His manager gave direction for projects and would hold one-on-one meetings to talk about what he was doing. He was not involved with assigning projects: those came from the mentor. He said his manager was always friendly. He felt he was a good manager but sometimes was not quite as easy to communicate with from a different engineering perspective.

The other intern offered that it is tough being the new guy and not knowing how the company operates. At first it was difficult to be self sufficient. He concluded by saying nothing about his experience was bad in his eyes. His suggestions for improvement were that a manager should let the intern learn at their own pace and that each internship experience may need to be customized for each intern's specific needs. He used the example that some people might need a little more structure or leadership than he had. He said that it is important to tell the intern who and where they can seek out help.

Two interns said that they were not formally assigned a mentor but were able to seek out one or more mentors out during their experience. One intern said that his manager would suggest different people to work with on each specific project.

One intern did not get a formal interview from the company. He said that he knew people at the company so therefore he was offered a position without any formal interview. He clarified that he was made aware of this position through a person who worked within the company. The person talked with the intern manager and the manager agreed that this intern would be a good fit. He was then contacted and offered the position over the telephone.

Another intern said that he felt his exit interview was very informal because it was almost implied that he would be coming back for another semester to intern again. His impression of the interview was that the intern manager just wanted to sit down quick and ask him how he felt the internship experience went and if he enjoyed it enough to want to come back again, or even consider a full-time position when he completed his degree.

Manager Perspectives

The data showed that intern managers also had many suggestions or thoughts on improving the internship program. These are some of their suggestions and responses.

One manager said that negative experiences can happen if planning for the intern is not done up-front. He suggested that if the intern comes from outside the area the manager should have a list of resources. For example, housing and entertainment should be considered. He also pointed out that the company could sponsor more inside and outside events geared toward getting all interns together during their experience.

One of the other managers said that it is difficult to commit to interns when the time is right. He pointed out that timing can sometimes be a problem. The process to gain approval for an intern student usually does not mesh with the timing of the internship opportunity. He believes that many of the interns had accepted other positions already by the time the company offered a position. This manager said that it is always a challenge to find technical things for the interns to do. He also stated that it can be challenging getting commitments from people to be a mentor for the intern student. This manager finished by saying that it sometimes is difficult to justify an intern.

The other manager stated that interaction with other groups is limited for the intern. He mentioned that the intern usually does not get much time to interact with other business units outside of normal activities. He also stated that it takes a lot of time to manage an intern effectively and time is hard to come by. It is important to be able to monitor the intern to make sure things are going smoothly. He stated that he continues to improve his structure for managing interns. He also thought that a 30 day review and a formal exit interview would be beneficial for all interns. He finished by saying that a successful experience takes time and doesn't happen on its own.

All three managers said that they do not conduct a formal exit interview. Two managers said that they do a very informal meeting at the end with the intern to discuss how things went and what they learned.

Chapter V: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter includes a brief summary of the study. Chapters three, four, and the data that supported each research question will be summarized. Conclusions and any recommendations will be made.

In this study interns and managers of Company X were interviewed to determine their perspective on the internship program. Questions were asked to ascertain the benefits of the current internship program at this company, skills that the intern gains during the experience, and if the opportunity helped the intern in their career search. All participants were also asked to offer suggestions for improving the current internship program. The data was collected during the months of March and April of 2009. Intern and manager responses were analyzed and grouped into similar and dissimilar responses to each question. Conclusions were made from these responses to address the research questions. The results verified that the program is beneficial to intern students and the company. Conclusions were made as suggestions to improve this company's current internship program.

Last year, Company X employed 26 interns within various departments. Company X has done very little follow-up assessment with former intern students to determine the effectiveness of the internship program. This study will attempt to analyze aspects of the internship program.

Any good program should be evaluated for effectiveness and improvements are made to benefit both the intern students and the sponsoring company. The purpose of this study is to ascertain the intern and intern manager's perception of the internship program at Company X.

Individuals who have completed and supervised an internship with this company were surveyed. The survey determined strengths and weaknesses of the current program, specific

skills learned during their experience, it's effect on career advancement, and possible suggestions for program improvement.

Benefits of Internship Program

Research question one asked what are the benefits of the current internship program as viewed by former intern students and intern student managers. The data showed the student interns felt that the internship was very beneficial.

Based on the data gathered for research question one it can be concluded that both the interns and managers agreed that there are many benefits to the current internship program at company X. Major benefits from the Intern and Manager's perspective were; the intern having a personal mentor to work with, challenging the intern to interact in teams and with other engineers, a properly equipped work space with pre-planned tasks for the intern student up front, plenty of internal and external activities that the interns were encouraged to participate in, and training opportunities.

Based on the conclusions it is recommended that the interns at Company X should be assigned one specific mentor at the beginning of the experience. One mentor will help guide the intern through daily tasks and as one intern suggested, the mentor was able to offer him much more attention on a daily basis than the manager could. It was notable that one suggestion of a manager and intern was that there should also be a list of other people within the organization that the intern could contact as resources for other more specialized projects and assistance.

Also all interns should be challenged with multi-department interaction where the student is allowed to work in teams with engineers and staff from other parts of the organization. External interaction with vendors and sales people from outside the company is also recommended to enhance the intern's communication skills.

In one case the intern believed that the manager was a little bit disorganized at the beginning of his internship experience. He said he thought that it was because this was the manager's first time managing an intern. That suggests the manager always have a well equipped work area, plenty of activities, and clear expectations for the intern student at the beginning of the experience.

Company based training opportunities were consistently offered but following the suggestion of one intern student who felt he did not receive any formal lab safety training it is recommended that all managers offer specialized training in their specific department. This training should cover at least lab and facilities safety and equipment training for all intern students.

Skills Interns Learned

Research question two asked what skills do interns gain during the internship program from an intern and intern manager's perspective? The data showed the student interns and managers felt that they gained specific skills during the experience.

Based on that data, it can be concluded that the managers and interns agreed that the current internship program at Company X gave the intern student many skills that were beneficial for their learning experience. Notable skills learned from the Intern and Manager's perspective were; experience gained from testing and evaluation in the lab, interaction with other departments, and being offered the opportunity to attend organizational and out of the office activities.

Based on the conclusions, it is highly recommended that engineering interns at Company X be assigned duties that require laboratory based testing. Managers and mentors should be willing to train their intern how to use the equipment and tools in their lab area. The intern would

then be required to use these skills to test current products or evaluate the performance of new projects. Problem solving skills could also be enhanced through lab time when the intern is challenged with legitimate problems.

The interns should also be given assignments that depend on interaction with other departments, vendors, or customers. One intern liked how his assignments started out smaller with more direct interaction with the mentor or manager. Then his assignments gradually became more difficult with more dependence with interaction outside of his direct department to complete. More than one intern said that their confidence increased when they were required to work outside of their direct department. It is also suggested that the managers at Company X design activities that also require interaction with vendors who supply raw goods, supplies, and assemblies to the department the intern is working in.

If the manager is comfortable allowing the intern to interact with end users or customers one intern noted that this was a very beneficial skill they developed.

Allowing the intern student to participate in organizational events and out of office activities increased the social skills and confidence of all the interns that participated because they felt like a part of the team or company and not an outsider.

Intern's Career Search

Research questions three asked does the internship experience contribute to an intern's career search after graduation. The data showed the student interns and managers felt that the internship gave the intern positive career opportunities.

Based on that data, it can be concluded that the interns agreed that the experience they received helped them become much more marketable to find a position after the experience. With the exception of an intern who is still completing school, both other interns received

immediate job offers upon graduation. The intern that is still in school pointed out that he feels he received interviewing skills and specialized training that will make him more desirable than other students in his current classes.

Based on the conclusions, it is recommended that intern managers at Company X require formal entrance and exit interviews for every intern they host. All managers and interns that participated in this study commented positively about the importance of an interview. The data suggested that most managers in this study did not do a formal exit interview. All the managers however did an informal exit interview, but the interns did indicate that they would have liked a more formal exit interview. One manager said that he liked the idea of an exit interview and planned to implement an exit interview with all of his future intern students.

It is also recommended by one manager that the intern students be encouraged to use this experience to network with people inside and outside the organization. The interns suggested that the student should also treat this opportunity as a resume builder for future career searches.

Improving the Internship Program

Research question four asked what are the participants' suggestions for improving the current internship program. The interns and managers offered many insightful recommendations for improvement.

Based on that data areas for improvement for Company X included; being prepared for the intern, conducting formal interviews, assigning a mentor, improving the process to gain approval for interns, and customized internships. Understanding the time commitment from a manager and mentor perspective is also important.

Based on the conclusions, being prepared for the intern is very important from a manager and intern perspective. Before the intern arrives the manager should be prepared by have

meaningful projects in place and an adequately equipped work area ready. Communicating their expectations to the intern at the beginning of the experience is important. Company X as a whole should also hold an intern orientation meeting for all interns. Only one intern said that he received an orientation geared specifically to the interns.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 5 multiple participants suggested that it is very important to conduct entrance and exit interviews between the manager and intern. One manager also suggested that a 30 day review also be given to the intern so the intern has some feedback part way through their experience.

Two managers touched on the fact that there is always room for improvement in the process to justify and approve interns within Company X. The research suggests that Company X look into ways to make it easier to offer internship opportunities in a timely manner.

Another manager said that it is important to understand the time commitment that is involved in hosting an intern student. He believed that in order to create a meaningful experience for an intern student the manager needs to understand that he/she will be spending significant amounts of time in the planning and support of the intern during their experience.

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Appendix A

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

Internship Evaluation Questioner (Intern)

1. Did you have a formal interview for your internship position? If so tell me about it.
2. Tell me about you formal intern orientation meeting?
3. Did you receive a formal exit interview? If so tell me about it.
4. Tell me about your manager?
5. Was your manager prepared for you when you began your internship experience?
6. Were you assigned a mentor to work with OTHER than your manager? If so how did that work?
7. Were your goals and assignments clearly communicated to you upfront?
8. Were you required to participate in, (or offered,) any initial training or safety activities?
9. Tell me about the quality and validity of your work assignments.
10. Were you invited to any organizational events or out of the office activities?

11. Were you encouraged to participate in department or organizational meetings?
12. How much exposure or interaction did you have with other departments within the company?
13. How were you treated by your manager, mentor, co-workers, and others within the organization?
14. What skills have you taken from this experience?
15. Would you recommend this company to other interns looking for a meaningful internship experience?
16. Would you consider your experience a win-win situation for you and the company?
17. What did you like most about your internship experience?
18. What did you like least about your internship experience?
19. Please provide specific examples of how the company could improve the internship program for future interns.

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

Internship Evaluation Questioner (Manager)

1. Do you formal interview for your interns for their internship position? If so tell me about it.
2. Do you require your interns to participate in a formal intern orientation meeting?
3. Do you give the intern students a formal exit interview? If so tell me about it.
4. Tell me about your management style as it pertains to managing intern students.
5. Before the intern even arrives what do you do to ensure a successful internship experience for the intern?
6. Do you assign a mentor to work with your intern? If so how did that work?
7. How and when do you communicate the goals and assignments to your intern students?
8. What initial training or safety activities do you provide your intern students?
9. How do you determine the quality and validity of the work assignments you assign the intern student?
10. Do you encourage your intern students to participate in any organizational events or out of the office activities?

11. How do you include the intern student in department and organizational meetings?
12. In what ways do you encourage the intern to interact with other departments within the company?
13. How do you feel your intern students are treated by others within the organization?
14. What skills do the intern students take from an internship experience at this company?
15. Would you recommend this company to potential interns looking for a meaningful internship experience?
16. Would you consider the current internship experience a win-win situation for the intern and the company?
17. What did you like most about managing an internship experience?
18. What did you like least about managing an internship experience?
19. Please provide specific examples of how the company could improve the internship program for future interns.